Post-Study Work and the Retention of Talent

The Year After the Degree

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European systems have introduced a right to remain after graduation and the right has been justified by the competition for talent rather than by the evidence of what happens in the year that follows. This article examines the transition: the four designs of a post-study route and the labour market each produces, the employer who does not recognise the foreign qualification, the graduate who works below her level, the salary threshold that excludes the professions the system needs, and the data that a system can collect about the first three years of a career. It argues that a post-study right is a labour market instrument rather than a migration instrument, and that a system which grants the years without the recognition has produced a cohort of graduates who drive taxis with a master's degree.

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1. The Right and Its Justification

A right to remain after graduation exists in most European systems and it was introduced in a decade in which the competition for skilled workers became an argument of policy.

The justification offered is threefold: the retention of the talent that the system has trained, the attraction of the students who choose a country by its labour market, and the contribution of the graduates to the economy that receives them. The three are plausible and the evidence about the year that follows a graduation is thinner than the argument.

The consequence is a set of systems that grant a period and do not measure the outcome. The instrument is a record of the transition: the employment of the graduates at one, three and five years, by qualification, by sector and by level of the post.

2. Four Designs

A post-study route is designed along four dimensions, and each produces a different labour market.

The first is the duration: a year, eighteen months or three years, granted on the completion of a degree. The second is the condition: an unrestricted right to work, a requirement of a job offer, or a requirement of a salary above a threshold.

The third is the recognition: whether the graduate can practise the regulated profession for which she studied, which depends on the authority of the profession rather than on the migration office. The fourth is the route onward: whether the period leads to a residence permit for work, and under what conditions.

3. The Salary Threshold

A salary threshold is the instrument through which a system selects the graduates it wishes to keep, and the selection is frequently the opposite of the need.

A threshold set at the average salary of the economy excludes the teachers, the nurses, the social workers and the researchers at the beginning of a career, which are the professions that the system reports as a shortage. The consequence is a route that retains the engineers and the analysts and expels the professionals of the public services.

The instrument is a threshold differentiated by profession, set from the salary scale of the collective agreement of the sector, with an exemption for the professions on the national list of shortage. A differenti-

ation of that kind costs a table and it is the condition under which the instrument serves the need it names.

4. The Employer Who Does Not Recognise

The barrier that the graduates describe most often is not the permit and it is the recognition of the qualification by the employer.

An employer who receives a curriculum from a system she does not know, in a language she may not read, discounts it and hires on the interview. The consequence is a graduate who works below her level in the first year, and the loss is the instrument's failure rather than the graduate's.

The instrument is a bridge: an internship of three months in a firm of the sector, organised by the institution with the employers of the region, which converts a foreign qualification into a demonstrated competence. The bridge is the instrument that the systems with the best retention have built and it costs a coordination rather than a budget.

5. The Regulated Profession

A graduate of medicine, law, teaching or engineering cannot practise until an authority recognises her qualification, and the period of the post-study right runs while the recognition is pending.

The consequence is a graduate who spends the year of the right in the procedure and leaves when the period expires. The instrument is a coordination: the recognition procedure opened in the final year of the study, with a provisional practice under supervision, and the period of the right suspended while the procedure is pending.

6. The Language of the Profession

The language of the profession is not the language of the degree, and the gap is the second barrier that the graduates describe.

A nurse who has studied in English may not be able to speak to a patient in the national language, and a teacher may not be able to manage a class. The consequence is a graduate who is qualified and not

employable, and a system that has funded the formation of a professional it cannot place.

The instrument is a language provision that is professional and delivered before the graduation, with the terminology of the sector and a practice in the setting, funded as a part of the programme. A provision of that kind is the difference between a degree and a licence.

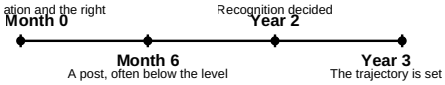

Figure 1 The three years after a degree

7. The Three Years

The outcome that a policy should measure is the employment at three years, and the third year is when the trajectory is decided.

A graduate who is in a post related to her qualification at three years is likely to remain; one who is in an unrelated post is likely to leave the country or the profession. The consequence is a policy that measures the first year, in which everyone is employed somewhere, and misses the year that matters.

The instrument is a survey at three years, with the qualification, the post, the salary and the intention to remain, conducted by the institution with the agency of the graduates. A survey of that kind is the instrument through which the policy of retention can be judged.

8. The Data

A system can publish four figures about the transition, and the four are held by the migration office, the institutions and the tax authority.

The first is the number of the graduates who use the post-study right, by qualification. The second is the share of them employed in a post related to the qualification at one and three years. The third is the share who obtain the recognition of a regulated profession. The fourth is the share who are still in the country at five years.

The four are administrative and survey facts and the fourth is the one that answers the question that the policy was introduced to answer.

Design	Parameter	Effect
Duration	One to three years	The time to find a post
Condition	Open, offer or threshold	Who is selected
Recognition	Before or after	Who can practise
Route onward	Permit for work	Who remains

Table 1 Four designs and the labour market each produces

9. The Region That Loses the Graduate

The retention of a graduate is a gain for the region of the institution and a loss for the region of her origin, and the two are frequently the same country.

A graduate from a regional city who studies in the capital and remains there has been retained by the system and lost by the territory. The consequence is a policy of retention that concentrates the population, and a cohesion policy that is contradicted by the migration instrument.

The instrument is a regional dimension: an incentive for the graduate who takes a post in a region with a shortage, with a supplement and a route of recognition, administered with the regional authority. A dimension of that kind reconciles the two policies that currently work against each other.

10. The Comparison Across Systems

The systems of Europe differ in the duration and the condition of the post-study right, and the difference is a competition that no system controls.

A system that grants three years and no condition attracts the graduates of its neighbours, and the neighbours respond by shortening their own or by adding a condition. The consequence is a race in which the sum of the rights is larger and the retention of each system is unchanged.

The instrument is a common framework: the same duration and the same conditions across the area, with the portability of the rights acquired. A framework of that kind is the only instrument through which the competition can be replaced by a mobility that the area intends.

11. The Sequence of a Policy

A system that decides to make its route work can do so in a sequence, and the sequence begins with the measurement.

The first step is the survey at three years and the four figures. The second is the threshold differentiated by profession and the exemption for the shortage. The third is the bridge with the employers and the language provision of the profession. The fourth is the coordination of the recognition and the regional dimension.

A sequence of that kind takes four years and the first step is a survey that the institutions can conduct with the agency of the graduates. A system that begins with an extension of the duration produces a longer stay in a post below the qualification.

13. The Second Generation

The graduate who remains is frequently the first of a family to hold a degree, and the effect of her retention on the household is the part of the policy that no indicator records.

She supports the studies of a sibling, she explains the system to a cousin, she becomes the reference of a neighbourhood in which no one has studied abroad. The consequence is a multiplier that the policy

of retention does not count and that the policy of development, when it exists, counts heavily.

The instrument is to recognise the effect: a survey of the graduates at five years that asks what became of the members of their household, and a statement of the result in the report of the programme. A statement of that kind is the only evidence that a policy of retention is also a policy of access.

13. Conclusions

A post-study right is a labour market instrument rather than a migration instrument, and a system which grants the years without the recognition has produced a cohort of graduates who drive taxis with a master's degree.

Three conclusions follow. The selection must fit the need: a threshold differentiated by profession, set from the collective agreements, with an exemption for the professions on the shortage list. The transition must be bridged: an internship with the employers of the sector, the language of the profession taught before the graduation, and the recognition procedure opened in the final year. And the outcome must be measured: the employment at one, three and five years by qualification and by level of the post, the recognitions obtained and the share who remain, published every year.

A system that has done the three retains the graduates it trained. A system that has done none of them grants a period and calls the departure of its graduates a choice.

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Biography:

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